Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

The Assurance System Evaluation Framework and methodology

Support for legal and traceable agricultural commodities and timber decoupled from deforestation

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

The Assurance System Evaluation Framework and methodology

Support for legal and traceable agricultural commodities and timber decoupled from deforestation

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, 2026

Required citation:
FAO. 2026. The Assurance Systems Evaluation Framework and methodology – Support for legal and traceable agricultural commodities and timber decoupled from deforestation. Rome. https://doi.org/10.4060/cd9564en

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) concerning the legal or development status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The mention of specific companies or products of manufacturers, whether or not these have been patented, does not imply that these have been endorsed or recommended by FAO in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned.

ISBN 978-92-5-140679-3
© FAO, 2026

Some rights reserved. This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution- 4.0 International licence (CC BY 4.0: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode.en).

Under the terms of this licence, this work may be copied, redistributed and adapted, provided that the work is appropriately cited. In any use of this work, there should be no suggestion that FAO endorses any specific organization, products or services. The use of the FAO logo is not permitted. If a translation or adaptation of this work is created, it must include the following disclaimer along with the required citation: "This translation [or adaptation] was not created by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). FAO is not responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation [or adaptation]. The original [Language] edition shall be the authoritative edition."

Any dispute arising under this licence that cannot be settled amicably shall be referred to arbitration in accordance with the Arbitration Rules of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL). The parties shall be bound by any arbitration award rendered as a result of such arbitration as the final adjudication of such a dispute.

Third-party materials. This Creative Commons licence CC BY 4.0 does not apply to non-FAO copyright materials included in this publication. Users wishing to reuse material from this work that is attributed to a third party, such as tables, figures or images, are responsible for determining whether permission is needed for that reuse and for obtaining permission from the copyright holder. The risk of claims resulting from infringement of any third-party-owned component in the work rests solely with the user.

FAO photographs. FAO photographs that may appear in this work are not subject to the above-mentioned Creative Commons licence. Queries for the use of any FAO photographs should be submitted to: photo-library@fao.org.

Sales, rights and licensing. FAO information products are available on the FAO website (www.fao.org/publications) and print copies can be purchased through the distributors listed there. For general enquiries about FAO publications please contact: publications@fao.org. Queries regarding rights and licensing of publications should be submitted to: copyright@fao.org.

Cover photograph: @FAO/Maryia Kukharava; @FAO/Marc Vandenhaute

DISCLAIMER

Any interpretation of the evaluation findings of an assurance system is at the sole discretion of the reader and does not lead to products with a corresponding claim or label to be considered in conformance with the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) or any other legal statute and thereby gain access to the EU market without the requirement of the appropriate due diligence. The responsibility for complying with any legal requirement is always at the sole discretion of the operator to ensure full due diligence on products placed on the EU market, as stated in the EUDR, recital 52) *"In order to recognise good practice, certification or other third-party verified assurance systems could be used in the risk assessment procedure. They should not, however, substitute the operator's responsibility as regards due diligence."*

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Objectives of the ASEF 2

The Assurance System Evaluation Framework 3

  Scope 3

  Framework sections 3

    A: Verified entity | Production 3

    B: Verified entity | Internal control 5

    C: The assurance provider 5

    D: The assurance system 5

ASEF Template and Report Format 6

Roles, required qualifications and responsabilities for conducting evaluations 6

  The lead evaluator (single or team leader) 6

  Evaluator team members 7

  Quality reviewer 7

  Evaluation team composition, calibration and substitution 8

  Impartiality and independence 8

  The communication and quality assurance stages 8

The evaluation procedure and guidance 8

  Evaluation steps 9

  Additional guidance for the evaluation 15

  Definition and explanation of the possible evaluation conclusions 17

Annex A: The Assurance System Evaluation Framework Template 18

Annex B: The Assurance System Evaluation Report Template 18

Annex C: The Conflict of Interest Declaration Template 18

INTRODUCTION

A number of international frameworks and UN related agreements establish foundational principles for sustainable forest management, including deforestation-free practices. In line with these international commitments, an increasing number of due diligence legislations targeting responsible sourcing have emerged. These legislations are often, but not exclusively, introduced by consumer market countries with the aim of reducing the impact on the environment and promoting responsible consumption and production.

Some of the first examples of these types of legislations in the forestry context were the US Lacey Act, the EU Timber Regulation and the Australian Illegal Logging Prohibition Act. These legislations focused on ensuring the legal harvesting of wood-products introduced into their markets.

In 2023, the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) came into force, going beyond legality and timber to focus also on avoiding (legal and illegal) deforestation and forest degradation through a general prohibition and requirement on relevant entities to conduct due diligence on their supply chains. The regulation covers wood products as well as a selected number of agricultural commodities and derived products that are often associated with deforestation (i.e. rubber, coffee, cocoa, oil palm, soy, cattle). As mentioned in its preamble, the EUDR is expected to contribute to the implementation of the above mentioned global agreements and frameworks aiming at the reduction of deforestation and forest degradation such as the 1992 Rio Conventions, the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 and its Global Forest Goals and the Paris Agreement, as well as the multilateral framework in support of tackling the root causes of deforestation and forest degradation, such as the SDGs, in particular SDG target 15.2 to halt deforestation by 2020. This target has not been met, underlining the urgency of ambitious and effective action. The Regulation is also expected to respond to the New York Declaration on Forests, a non-legally binding political declaration that endorses a global timeline to cut natural forest loss in half by 2020 and to strive to end it by 2030. The Declaration also called on the private sector to meet the goal of eliminating deforestation from the production of agricultural commodities such as palm oil, soy, paper and beef products by no later than 2020, a goal that was not achieved.

For private-sector actors, compliance with due diligence requirements imposed by these legislations can be complex. The use of assurance systems may help mitigate risks and facilitate compliance with due diligence obligations. However, these systems are not automatically recognized under due diligence legislations. There is no "green lane" status for verified or certified products, making it essential to understand how well an assurance system aligns with the scope of the legislation.

To facilitate due diligence, the Assurance System Evaluation Framework (ASEF) was developed as a structured approach to evaluate the scope and robustness of verification and certification systems for deforestation-risk commodities. The ASEF was trialed in four pilot evaluations to test its feasibility, clarity and reliability. Insights from these pilots informed targeted revisions to the framework's criteria, indicators and guidance materials. In parallel, feedback gathered through a public consultation and an expert workshop was incorporated. Taken together, these inputs allowed to strengthen the ASEF by clarifying definitions, streamlining procedures, and adding practical tools to improve its usability, consistency and credibility. Its genesis lies in the recognition that a tool was needed to generate detailed, standardized and comparable evaluations of the scope and credibility of assurance systems for companies choosing a system as part of their due diligence as well as for system owners aiming to maintain relevance and improve alignment with evolving market requirements and legislation.

The ASEF comprises criteria, sub-criteria and indicators organized under four sections: A. Production Requirements, B. Internal Control, C. Assurance Providers, and D. Assurance Systems. Some of the criteria and indicators included in the Production Requirements section of the ASEF were drawn from Version 1.5 of Preferred by Nature's Sustainability Framework. This Sustainability Framework published in March 2025 after a public consultation process, is based on widely accepted legality, traceability and deforestation-free principles and international voluntary standards developed in response to the above-mentioned international frameworks and UN related agreements. ASEF Production Requirements are therefore aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, international human rights instruments, and the International Labour Organization's Fundamental Conventions, which inform expectations related to decent work, non-discrimination, child protection and freedom of association. Environmental requirements are informed by global norms such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and

---

[1] Assurance systems are structured frameworks designed to provide confidence that products, processes, or services comply with specified standards, requirements, or regulations. In the context of agricultural and forest commodities production, assurance systems include mechanisms such as certification (typically third party audited and voluntary schemes) and legality verification (usually mandatory schemes involving government oversight, with or without 3rd party auditing).

internationally recognized ecosystem protection principles. Requirements on the prohibition and control of hazardous chemicals are anchored in the Stockholm, Rotterdam, and Montreal Conventions.
In addition to Production Requirements, the ASEF includes dedicated components to evaluate other critical aspects of assurance systems. These cover internal control requirements for verified entities (e.g. due diligence and material control), the competence and integrity of assurance providers, and the overall robustness and governance of the assurance system. Together, they enable a comprehensive evaluation of whether an assurance system is credible and effective, and aligned with enacted deforestation related market regulations, starting with the EUDR.

These additional components are anchored in globally recognized principles for sustainable forest management and in international assurance and quality-management standards, including ISO norms. Collectively, these international sustainability and assurance references establish a normative and procedural benchmark that is internationally coherent, credible and applicable across sectors and geographies, and which underpins the ASEF's design.

This document contains a methodology to evaluate the scope and robustness of verification and certification systems for deforestation-risk agricultural commodities, using the ASEF, which is provided in Annex A (See separate document: *The Assurance System Evaluation Framework Template)*.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ASEF

The Assurance System Evaluation Framework (ASEF) and methodology have been developed with the objective to evaluate the ability and effectiveness of assurance systems to demonstrate alignment with both due diligence regulations and voluntary market commitments related to deforestation, legality and traceability.
Version 1.0 of the ASEF was developed taking into consideration the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) since it is the most impactful and only enacted deforestation-related due diligence regulation to date. However, the ASEF and corresponding methodology is expected to be updated to take up additional regulations as they are enacted or as regulations are amended or clarified through the issuance of additional guidance. Evaluators are therefore recommended to use the latest version of the ASEF.

The evaluation is expected to indicate what assurance system's claim(s) cover and do not cover, and how robust[2] they are. Results should help:

- system owners or managers to improve requirements to better align their assurance system to deforestation free market requirements; and
- operators to define how assurance systems can be used for due diligence related risk mitigation, indicating whether system claims should be complemented with additional checks;
- law enforcement authorities to help them understand which assurance system's claims support risk mitigation and to what extent.

For example:

ASEF evaluations can help importers subjected to import regulations, determine the extent to which a label or claim of a particular assurance system (e.g., for coffee, cocoa, or palm oil) can be used as part of their risk mitigation efforts. Based on evaluation results, producers can make informed decisions when selecting an assurance system they would like to join.
With ASEF evaluation results, system owners may choose to upgrade their assurance systems to better align with market requirements.

Customs officers assessing due diligence by importers can decide to decrease checks on consignments of certified products if ASEF evaluation results for the corresponding assurance system is positive.

At least some gaps or weaknesses in an assurance system's ability to demonstrate full alignment with market regulations are to be expected, since these systems were, in most if not all cases, not originally designed to respond to this new regulatory environment.

---

[2] An assurance system is robust when it is: well-founded – based on credible processes and solid governance; comprehensive – covering all relevant aspects without major gaps; transparent – providing clear and transparent information; inclusive – considering diverse stakeholder perspectives.

THE ASSURANCE SYSTEM EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The ASEF is applicable to verified entities, assurance providers and the assurance system, and aims at addressing production requirements, assurance providers requirements and assurance system requirements.

Scope

The ASEF comprises **Criteria**, **Sub-criteria** and **Indicators** to categorize and evaluate current verification and certification systems, covering different aspects of the system functions, including the efficiency and soundness of the system's assurance mechanisms.

The ASEF and evaluation methodology are intended to be applied to assurance systems using a systematic approach to assurance, where a set of requirements, rules and procedures are consistently applied. This Framework is designed to evaluate assurance systems with verification or certification components, with a particular emphasis on systems that demonstrate impartiality through independent assessment mechanisms. While the Framework can accommodate various forms of assurance activities, it places special value on verification and certification systems that operate with clear independence from both the entities being assessed and the users of the assessment outcomes.

Traceability elements are included and this Framework evaluates a broader set of assurance mechanisms including **best assessment practices**. Organizations seeking to evaluate standalone traceability or information transfer systems should use specialized assessment tools designed specifically for that purpose. The ASEF may be used to evaluate any assurance system, on a voluntary basis, at the request or with the approval (if initiated by somebody else) of the system owner or manager.

Framework sections

The ASEF (Annex A. See separate document: *The Assurance System Evaluation Framework Template*) divides the evaluation requirements into different sections corresponding to different sets of requirements.

Below, the sections of the ASEF are described according to requirements for: (i) verified entities; (ii) the assurance provider; and (iii) the assurance system.

A: Verified entity | Production

This section covers the criteria to evaluate the production requirements of verification and certification systems with regard to deforestation and legality. The objective is to analyse the scope of these systems regarding deforestation and requirements for legal production, and how well their normative requirements are defined. The production requirements are currently aligned with performance indicators relevant to the EUDR but can be adapted to incorporate additional regulatory requirements as soon as they are enacted.

The production requirements to consider for evaluation of the verified entities are:

a. Legal requirements related to:

   i. Land-use rights
   ii. Environmental protection
   iii. Forest-related rules
   iv. Third parties' rights
   v. Labour rights
   vi. Human rights protected under international law
   vii. Principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)
   viii. Tax, anti-corruption, trade and customs.

b. Deforestation and degradation-related requirements. As far as the EUDR is concerned, the topic of degradation is relevant exclusively for forest and wood-related standards (art. 2(13)).

The normative requirements for verified entities are the formal expectations that companies must meet. These serve as the basis for evaluating how well an assurance system covers legality and deforestation-related aspects.

NOTE ON
EUDR Legality Requirements

Art. 3 (b) of the EUDR prescribes that relevant commodities (cattle, cocoa, coffee, oil palm, rubber, soya and wood) and derived products shall not be placed or made available on the EU market or exported, unless *"they have been produced in accordance with the relevant legislation of the country of production". According to article 2(40) of the EUDR relevant legislation of the country of production' means "the laws applicable in the country of production concerning the legal status of the area of production in terms of: (a) land use rights; (b) environmental protection; (c) forest-related rules, including forest management and biodiversity conservation, where directly related to wood harvesting; (d) third parties' rights; (e) labour rights; (f) human rights protected under international law; (g) the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), including as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; (h) tax, anti-corruption, trade and customs regulations".*

However, article 2(40) of the EUDR remains subject to ongoing discussions in relation to the interpretation of which laws would fit within each of the eight categories of relevant legislation. While the European Commission's (2nd Iteration, April 2025) guidance document provides some clarifications, it is important to note that the guidance "is not legally binding" and cannot *"replace, add to or amend the provisions of the EUDR, which establishes the legal obligations"*.

Different stakeholders have adopted varying interpretations on which laws of the country of production should be considered for EUDR compliance, from narrow approaches focusing solely on laws directly linked to objectives of the regulation, while others have adopted broader interpretations encompassing a wider vision of laws for each of the categories of relevant legislation specified in the EUDR.

This Framework adopts a comprehensive approach while recognizing that relevant legislation is fundamentally defined by the regulatory framework within the country of production. The assessment methodology prioritizes national legal frameworks as the primary reference point for the areas of law specified in the EUDR. This ensures that human rights, labour rights and other nationally legally mandated protections remain integral to compliance assessments.

The comprehensive interpretation serves legitimate compliance and risk management purposes given ongoing regulatory ambiguities, varying Member State enforcement approaches, and the absence of definitive judicial interpretations. By casting a wider net across how the scope of relevant legislation is defined, the ASEF seeks to reduce non-compliance risks for operators, by maintaining the EUDR's commitment to protecting workers' and human rights alongside environmental objectives.

Additionally, this Framework recognizes that assurance systems may operate using international standards or national standards, and that a single assurance system may be evaluated for international applicability or country-specific contexts. Given that some commodity production may be exempt from certain regulations, a comprehensive approach ensures appropriate coverage while maintaining flexibility. Clear marking of requirements as 'not applicable when justified' ensures that the framework remains practical, flexible and proportionate to actual legal obligations. Section 6.4, Definition of conclusion options, provides the thresholds for which a legality indicator is marked as not applicable.

NOTE ON
Trade and custom rgulations

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) clarify that EUDR legal production requirements extend to certain supply chain elements. According to Art. 2(40), legislation is relevant when it concerns the legal status of the production area. Trade and customs laws, while not directly concerning the production area's legal status, can be relevant if they specifically address agricultural or timber production sectors (e.g. requiring forest-related documentation at customs). However, these trade and customs requirements apply exclusively to the country of production, not to subsequent processing countries. This interpretation aligns with the EU Timber Regulation approach. The FAQs note that trade laws "can also be relevant" rather than "only relevant", suggesting a broader interpretation.

B: Verified entity | Internal control

B1 Requirements for material control

The criteria and indicators related to material control have been developed to evaluate whether a system includes requirements to ensure that material from unknown sources is not mixed into the product flow included in the scope of the certification. This may be via a chain-of-custody (CoC) system using different forms of physical separation or risk-based supply chain management approaches. It should be underlined that it is not a requirement of the ASEF that systems have a specific type of CoC system, but production requirements are needed that assure the absence of mixing.

It should be evaluated if a system includes requirements for the passing of data related to information on geolocation and date/time of harvesting, as well as the verification of transactions between entities working within the system.
Segregating and physically tracking certified or verified materials along the supply chain is crucial. This ensures alignment with the EUDR by reducing the risk of mixing with products of unknown origin or from areas where deforestation or forest degradation has occurred.

B2: Quality and procedural requirements for verified entities

The ASEF contains criteria that evaluates how the system ensures that verified entities have in place systems, capacity and qualifications to continually meet the system requirements. It will also be evaluated how the verification and certification systems include measures to control potential conflicts and manage corruption risks within the verified entity's operations.

B3: Risk-based approaches to sourcing, trade and production

Criteria have been included to identify whether a risk-based approach to material control is included in the scope of the assurance system, and if it is compatible with the requirements of the EUDR on due diligence and risk assessment development.

C: The assurance provider

The aspects to consider for evaluating assurance providers are verification or auditing mechanisms and quality assurance. Here, the terms 'certification body' and 'assurance provider' are used interchangeably.
The criteria in the ASEF are defined as follows:

C.1. General assurance provider requirements
C.2. Assurance provider requirements for auditing and certification/verification.

This section of the ASEF establishes detailed criteria for evaluating assurance provider requirements and verification processes. It outlines specific indicators for assessing competence, impartiality, verification methodology, stakeholder consultation and corruption prevention mechanisms.

D: The assurance system

The assurance system criteria in the ASEF are formulated to evaluate the overall management of the assurance system (herein also referred to as 'system'), such as standard setting and revision processes, as well as its ongoing maintenance and development, which involve, among other things, ensuring system transparency and managing complaints.
The assurance system criteria in the ASEF are defined as follows:

D.1 Transparency
D.2 Standard scope
D.3 Accreditation and oversight
D.4 Verification process.

The ASEF recognizes that many assurance systems provide sustainability benefits and compliance assurance that extend beyond the core EUDR requirements of legality, deforestation-free production and traceability. These systems may address additional environmental, social and governance (ESG) aspects such as biodiversity conservation, fair trade practices, carbon emissions, animal welfare and community development.

Evaluation reports welcome a dedicated section describing what the Assurance System provides beyond EUDR compliance (see Annex B for the Assurance System Evaluation Report Template). This enables users to understand the full scope of assurance and sustainability benefits offered by the system, supporting informed decision-making for organizations with sustainability commitments that extend beyond compliance with the EUDR.

The ASEF could eventually evolve to incorporate other legislations or additional sustainability modules beyond its current focus on legality, deforestation, and traceability. This modular approach would allow evaluation of systems against broader sustainability criteria while maintaining clear distinctions between regulatory compliance and voluntary sustainability commitments.

ASEF TEMPLATE AND REPORT FORMAT

The evaluation of assurance systems should employ the following:

- The Assurance System Evaluation Framework (ASEF) template - Annex A. This Template consists of columns to be used in the assessment at the indicator and criterion levels, and columns for documenting conclusions, rationale, references, etc.
- The Assurance System Evaluation Report (ASER) template - Annex B. A summary of the ASER should be developed and provided with evaluation results and a short introduction to the system.

ROLES, REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR CONDUCTING EVALUATIONS

Each ASEF evaluation appoints a lead evaluator. Where the scope is complex, the lead evaluator may coordinate a team of evaluators. A separate quality reviewer conducts an independent review of the evaluation process and outputs.

The lead evaluator (single or team leader)

The role of the lead evaluator

This role serves as the primary interface with the assurance system owner/manager and with the quality reviewer, sets the evaluation plan, ensures consistent application of ASEF criteria and indicators, and signs off the draft ASEF/ASER before carrying out the quality review. If the evaluation is carried out by a team, the lead evaluator directs and coordinates the evaluation team, and is responsible for the integrity, coherence and reproducibility of the evaluation.

Qualifications and competence of the lead evaluator

The lead evaluator should possess all evaluator competencies and, should the evaluation be completed by a team, he or she should also demonstrate leadership capability in leading a group of evaluators covering different areas of expertise in case of complex systems (ideally evidenced by recent assignments as a team leader), project management across geographies and languages, advanced evaluation skills (interviewing, triangulation, testing evidence sufficiency and reliability, resolving divergent findings) and familiarity with the system or closely comparable systems and jurisdictions.

The lead evaluator should be an active status lead auditor for ISO/IEC 17065 (product/process/service certification) and should have applied competence in other standards applicable to the assurance mechanism, including ISO 19011 (audit guidance), ISO/IEC 17021-1 (management systems certification), ISO/IEC 17020 (inspection), ISO/IEC 17067 (scheme design) and ISEAL Code(s) of Good Practice.

Responsibilities and deliverables of the lead evaluator

The lead evaluator prepares the evaluation plan (scope, criteria in scope, methods, schedule), briefs and calibrates the team on the ASEF rating approach, and approves the stakeholder sampling. He or she ensures the team's competence, reconciles differences among evaluators, and raises unresolved issues to the quality reviewer with a documented rationale. Before finalization, the lead evaluator confirms that all review comments have been addressed or justified.

Evaluator team members

The role of the evaluator

The evaluator conducts document reviews, analyses and interviews, and performs verifications to evaluate conformity with ASEF criteria and indicators. They propose ratings (conclusion options) supported by a transparent and traceable rationale.

The qualifications and competence of the evaluator

Competence may be distributed across the team. Collectively, the evaluators should bring relevant education or equivalent experience to assurance systems, and practical experience in one or more of the following: auditing, development or management of ISO-based systems, ISEAL-aligned assurance, inspection or verification, and comparable assurance functions. They should understand assurance governance (impartiality, oversight, complaints/appeals, integrity controls); demonstrate sound analytical skills in collecting, triangulating and interpreting qualitative and quantitative evidence; and have working knowledge of deforestation-free requirements and applicable national legislation. They should be aware of the context regarding land tenure, deforestation dynamics, supply-chain realities and sufficient language skills for the scope (including local language capacity where necessary) are expected.

In addition, evaluators should have training and applied competence in one or more standards applicable to the assurance system, including ISO 19011 (audit principles and auditor competence), ISO/IEC 17021-1 (management system certification), ISO/IEC 17065 (product/process/service certification), ISO/IEC 17020 (inspection) and ISO/IEC 17067 (product certification scheme design), as well as the ISEAL Code(s) of Good Practice. Evidence of applied competence may include recognized training (e.g. ISO 19011 auditor/lead auditor), assessor experience under ISO/IEC 17065/17021-1/17020, documented application of ISO 14065 within validation/verification bodies, or equivalent programme documents defined by the scheme. The evaluators should maintain currency with the latest editions of these standards and any scheme-specific requirements.

Responsibilities and deliverables of evaluators

The evaluators carry out the assigned work under the evaluation plan, maintain accurate, referenced evidence records, conduct interviews in an ethical manner (informed consent, confidentiality, non-retaliation assurances), apply ASEF criteria and indicators consistently, and draft clear, well-reasoned findings and proposed ratings. They promptly flag gaps or uncertainties to the lead evaluator and document limitations and residual risk in their contributions to the ASEF and ASER.

Quality reviewer

The role of the quality reviewer

The quality reviewer independently verifies that the evaluation has been conducted in accordance with this methodology and the approved plan, that evidence is sufficient and reliable, and that ratings and rationale are consistent with ASEF rules and comparable evaluations.

The qualifications and competence of the quality reviewer

The reviewer should have relevant education or equivalent experience in assurance systems and at least three years of practical knowledge and experience in related functions such as auditing, ISO-system development/management, ISEAL-aligned assurance, or benchmarking/meta-evaluation. Strong analytical and writing skills are required to assess sufficiency and traceability of evidence, logic of ratings, handling of contradictory information, and clarity of reporting. Familiarity with the system or similar systems and regions is expected.

In addition, the quality reviewer should have training and applied competence in the relevant standards as applicable to the assurance mechanism, including ISO 19011 (audit principles and auditor competence), ISO/IEC 17021-1 (management system certification), ISO/IEC 17065 (product/process/service certification), ISO/IEC 17020 (inspection) and ISO/IEC 17067 (product certification scheme design), as well as the ISEAL Code(s) of Good Practice. Evidence of competence may include recognized training (e.g. ISO 19011 lead auditor/lead evaluator), assessor experience under ISO/IEC 17065/17021-1/17020, or documented application of ISO 14065 within validation/verification bodies. The quality reviewer should maintain currency with the latest editions of these standards and any scheme-specific programme documents.

Responsibilities and deliverables of the quality reviewer

The quality reviewer conducts an initial review (confirming the scope of the evaluation, sampling and team competence/independence. For complex or high-risk cases, the quality reviewer may perform a mid-term review to confirm the early evidence of an adequate evaluation approach and coverage. At the final review, the quality reviewer assesses the draft ASEF/ASER, issues a quality review, and records comments and required actions. Closure is confirmed only when all comments are addressed or justified.

Evaluation team composition, calibration and substitution

Where there is a team of evaluators, the lead evaluator ensures that, collectively, the team has the required competencies covering to the scope of the evaluation, i.e. commodity expertise, assurance system experience, legal and regulatory knowledge, social and environmental expertise, traceability and chain of custody (CoC) and language capacity. Before the collection of evidence, the team quickly calibrates the ASEF rating scale, using a historical or hypothetical case, and records any clarifications. If a team member is replaced, the competence matrix and independence declarations are updated and, where material, the quality reviewer is notified.

Impartiality and independence

To safeguard objectivity, it is recommended not to appoint an active auditor operating under the assurance system to conduct the evaluation or the quality review. All team members must declare potential or actual conflicts of interest before assignment and keep declarations current. Where recent engagements create a material risk, a cooling-off period or the replacement of the concerned team member is applied and recorded. Evaluators and reviewers shall provide signed declarations of competence and independence for each evaluation (see Annex C).

The communication and quality assurance stages

The lead evaluator acts as the single point of contact with the system owner or manager. Information requests are tracked in a simple register with due dates. Comments from the assurance system owner/manager are logged together with responses (accepted, partially accepted, or rejected with rationale). Material disagreements on ratings are recorded in the decision log and, if unresolved, highlighted for the quality review. Stage-gates comprise approval of the evaluation plan, any mid-review check where warranted, and final review and closure.

NOTE ON

The external oversight of ASEF implementation

During the public consultation leading to ASEF Version 1.0, some stakeholders recommended the use of external oversight (e.g. independent panels or accreditation bodies) to further safeguard impartiality and ensure quality and consistency. The establishment of an ASEF Application Consortium or Partnership to carry out such external oversight could be considered as a potential strategic development in advancing ASEF implementation.

THE EVALUATION PROCEDURE AND GUIDANCE

The assurance system evaluation procedure follows a structured sequence of distinct steps that should be followed. These steps are presented below in their recommended order of implementation, with each step explained in detail:

a. Application of the Assurance System Evaluation Framework by evaluators
b. The quality review
c. Public consultation (recommended)
d. Approval of the final Assurance System Evaluation Report.

Evaluation steps

A. Application of the assurance system Evaluation Framework by evaluators

The application of the Evaluation Framework should be applied according to the following steps:

STEP 1

Contact the assurance system owner and identify the scope of the evaluation. If the evaluation is not requested or initiated by the assurance system, request consent for conducting the evaluation, from Assurance System owner. Identify the contact point within the assurance system.

This step should include communication with the system owners or managers to inform them of the evaluation, as well as to ensure that the evaluators have access to the correct and sufficient information on the functioning of the system. The ASEF should always be applied to its full extent, and evaluators must clarify with the system owner which documents should be considered. Prior to beginning the evaluation process, the entity commissioning the evaluation and/or the system owner should clearly define the **claim** that forms the basis of the evaluation and predefine the system documents to be included.

The evaluation of the system can be conducted at the international, regional or national levels. If the evaluation specifically focuses on implementation in a particular region or country, regional and country-specific standards and related guidance should be used whenever available. The latter also applies to jurisdictional and landscape-level approaches.

Assurance systems differ in the way that they structure requirements in their standards. Before selecting system documentation, it is essential to carefully differentiate between obligatory requirements and voluntary additional modules.

The evaluation should focus on obligatory requirements, and voluntary modules should only be included when they are explicitly part of the scope of the evaluation (e.g. in voluntary EUDR standards). When voluntary add-on modules, standards in transition, or pilot provisions are included in the scope of the evaluation, the evaluation report must clearly identify these components and include appropriate disclaimers regarding their status, implementation timeline, and any limitations in their current applicability. Claims based on voluntary or transitional elements must be transparently distinguished from those based on fully operational obligatory requirements.
Additionally, the evaluator should identify which requirements apply to different stakeholder groups (e.g. smallholders versus companies, or farm-level versus supply chain actors) to ensure accurate assessment of coverage and applicability across the system.

Smallholder considerations: While the EUDR maintains universal due diligence obligations, it also acknowledges potential challenges when sourcing in smallholder contexts (Articles 11 and 30). It is important to recognize that smallholder contexts may require different approaches to demonstrating compliance within national legal frameworks. Where national legislation permits alternative forms of documentation, demonstration of compliance or community-based verification, such mechanisms may be considered valid evidence of compliance. When the scope of the evaluation specifically addresses smallholders, the evaluation should consider smallholder-specific criteria, group certification mechanisms, or other tailored provisions through a dedicated and separate analysis. The implementation of the Framework should also recognize that customary or community-based tenure systems may be legally valid even without formal and documented title deeds. This aspect of the evaluation should assess how the assurance system accommodates smallholder constraints while upholding the integrity of legal compliance, for example, through simplified documentation requirements, cooperative or community-held records, state-led audits or capacity-building mechanisms.

In addition to the above main standards, other documented normative requirements (e.g. related system standards, policies, procedures, interpretations, directives, instructions) should be identified as necessary, as well as any documented guidance that supports the operational interpretation of the standards (e.g. auditor guidance, advice notes, and other tools or resources).

At the outset of each system evaluation, an initial list of information required from the system may be prepared and presented to system personnel.

STEP 2

Identify and review relevant assurance system documents. Identify publicly available information from the system.

Identify all the system normative requirement(s) or other core documents[3] that are considered to cover a corresponding ASEF indicator, and record them in the report template. For each indicator, the following should be considered by evaluators using a systematic approach to ensure complete coverage of the system in the analysis. This approach makes it clearer that the evaluator isn't simply checking if these elements exist but is making qualitative judgments about their implementation:

- Scope of documentation: relevant types of system standards and whether they adequately cover the necessary requirements.
- Verification models: the various models of certification or verification employed and their suitability;
- Interim measures: any approved temporary or interim standards and whether they maintain sufficient rigor.
- Transitional implementation: approved final versions of standards/guidance that have not yet come into force or are in a transitional phase, and the appropriateness of implementation timelines;
- System guidance: a clear description of the system guidance or other tools or resources that describe how requirements should be interpreted, which are considered most relevant to the ASEF indicator.
- Evaluators should consider the risks of using draft versions, temporary or interim-approved standards. These may not have been finalized and/or approved as an assurance system document. References: Sources referenced in the assurance system Evaluation Report (ASER) should be described as follows: (i) the certification system (if not indicated in the standard code; (ii) the standard code or name; iii) Version; (iv) relevant criterion or indicator; and (v) link on the system's website. For example: PEFC ST 2002:2013 2015-12-07 Second Edition, criterion 5.4.1: https://cdn.pefc.org/pefc.org/media/2019-02/023fae13-c278-4104-93e0-bf48b123bc8b/5aa3f8bc-30c3-5f99-951e-e6a8f6d1d01b.pdf

STEP 3

Evaluation of system alignment with the ASEF

The evaluation should be carried out in the ASEF Excel template.

The evaluation of whether the system is aligned with the requirements of the ASEF should be based on the information gathered in step 2. The evaluation consists of a desk review of documentation on the assurance system's requirements, mechanisms and operations.

Regarding document findings, each indicator of the ASEF should be evaluated. For each indicator, the evaluation includes specific evidence from relevant standard documents in the Findings column, according to the following format:

- Source: Reference to the document.
- Key findings: Direct quotations of the relevant text that demonstrate coverage with the indicator.

Record the level of conformance of the system with the indicator. Based on the Findings, the indicator level should be clearly formulated as **Fully covered, Partially Covered, Not covered or Not applicable.**

An appropriate justification should be provided for coverage by the system of the specific indicator in the ASEF, as necessary. This will apply the following approximate format:

- **A discussion of findings:** This includes an overview of issues and risks (based on referenced sources) relevant to the indicator.
- **Variations:** This includes any variations in conformance between standards/requirements under the assurance system. For example: FSC® FM (Forest Management) certification and FSC Controlled Wood Standard may cover an indicator, whereas FSC Small and Low Intensity Managed Forests (SLIMF) Certification does not."
- **Conclusion:** This should be clearly labelled as Fully covered, Partially covered, Not covered or Not applicable.

---

[3] These may be system guides, interpretations, directives, policies, procedures or advice notes

- **Justification:** Each conclusion should provide the rationale behind the final conclusion, for example, “Based on findings x, y and z, it is concluded that the indicator is Partially covered”.

Record the level of conformance of the system with the criterion. The level of conformance with the criterion should be clearly formulated as Fully Covered, Intent Covered, Partially Covered, Not covered or Not applicable. Intent Covered may be used where the system standards meet the intent at a criterion level, even if some specific indicators may not be fully covered.

Intent Covered should not be applied at the indicator level because it is specifically designed as a criterion-level conclusion option. Individual indicators represent specific measurable requirements that are either adequately addressed or not. For indicators, use Fully Covered when the requirement is met, Partially Covered when only some aspects are addressed, or Not Covered when the requirement is not met. The “Intent Covered” designation requires assessing whether the overall purpose of a criterion is met through the collective contribution of multiple indicators, even when some individual indicators may have gaps. Applying this concept at the indicator level would undermine the precision of the evaluation framework and could lead to inconsistent interpretations where evaluators might subjectively decide that an indicator’s intent is met through unrelated measures.

STEP 4

Direct interviews and discussions with relevant assurance systems personnel (consultation with the assurance system under evaluation - 1st round).

Contact the relevant assurance systems personnel to clarify potential gaps in coverage with the system owner. It should be underlined that direct and clear communication with the system owner is paramount to the evaluation process.

Questions may be submitted by email, and then written responses providing evidence (e.g. additional data, information, guidance or normative documents) requested in return. Interviews with system personnel (and, when relevant, related bodies such as assurance providers, accreditation bodies and verified entities) are expected to provide the evaluation team with information about the intended functioning of systems and deepen the understanding of the activities of the system’s participants.
Email or calls can be used to collect answers to questions according to the specific information needed. Written communication, where possible, will save time and ensure that accurate records of the system response are recorded.

If necessary, follow-up interviews can be conducted or calls made either by phone or online to clarify questions or responses in the email exchange. Where possible, they should be carried out in the language of the interviewee. The subject matter for future interviews with system personnel should vary according to the questions that remain or gaps that require filling in the evaluation.

Returned written responses (and/or interview notes) should be saved in the relevant file with a systematic file name.

Sources referenced in the Assurance System Evaluation Report (ASER) should be labelled as follows: (i) certification system; (ii) interview/email date; and (iii) interviewee position. For example:

- BV call-14/10/2020-Head of Accreditation
- FSC email responsel-09/12/2020-Head of Accreditation.

Note: The evaluator may contact the system owners and ask them to provide relevant information. However, the evaluator has ownership of, and remains responsible for, the content and quality of the input. To this end, all information completed by others should be checked by the evaluator.

STEP 5

Review other sources of public information, if available.

This step aims to assess the effectiveness and robustness of the assurance system. To ensure an objective evaluation, additional sources of information may be considered beyond those provided by the system owner. Publicly available information may also be reviewed, including recent studies on specific value chains and independent tools and methodologies designed to evaluate the performance and credibility of verification and certification systems.

Evaluators should also consider existing substantiated reports on possible shortcomings or problems of the certification or third-party verified assurance system.

When reviewing such reports, evaluators should:

- assess the credibility and substantiation of the sources;
- consider whether reported issues relate to systemic problems or isolated incidents;
- evaluate whether the assurance system has addressed identified shortcomings through corrective measures;
- recognize that some systems may be subject to more scrutiny and reporting than others, which does not necessarily reflect the relative robustness of different systems; and
- focus on documented evidence rather than unsubstantiated claims.

In the evaluation, the consideration of critical reports and the overall systematic assessment of the assurance system's documented requirements and implementation mechanisms should be balanced.

STEP 6

Consultation with the assurance system personnel under evaluation – 2nd round.

Present the findings to relevant assurance system personnel to obtain feedback and clarify potential remaining unclarities.

System owners should be directly contacted and supplied with the draft evaluations and have the time (minimum two weeks) to review and provide comments. Also, one call with system owners, or more, where necessary, should be arranged to present the final draft findings and allow the system owners to ask questions and provide feedback.

Handling disagreements

When disagreements arise between the evaluator and the assurance system owner regarding evaluation findings, the following procedures should be followed:

- All disagreements and the system owner's responses must be documented in detail.
- Evaluators may only modify conclusions when the system owner provides additional documented evidence that substantively addresses the identified gap.
- Where disagreements persist despite a review of additional documentation, both the evaluator's assessment and the system owner's position should be clearly recorded.
- All unresolved controversies and any evaluation results modified due to feedback by the system owner must be disclosed to the quality reviewers.
- The final evaluation report should transparently document any significant disagreements and the rationale for the final conclusions.

STEP 7

Complete the Assurance System Evaluation Report (ASER).

A three-page summary report of the ASEF results should be prepared in Word format consisting of a short introduction of the system, the scope of evaluation based on the system's claim, its strengths and gaps, as well recommendations and a list of references. Each section of the evaluation report should to be completed according to the following instructions:

About: Provide a short description of the assurance system and the scope of the evaluation, including commodities and the geographical scope. The description should cover the uniqueness of the system, explaining the standard structure in terms of how it is applied (the farm vs. the supply chain, voluntary vs. compulsory, smallholder vs. bigger companies, etc.). Clearly state which system claim was incorporated into the scope of the evaluation. Include any other relevant information you consider necessary to effectively describe the system. Keep your description concise, under 150 words.

Strengths and gaps: Based on the indicator-level findings, the conclusion and the justification, describe the strengths and gaps of the system across these three key sections:

1. Standards alignment: Evaluate compliance with the EUDR's deforestation-free definition, cut-off date, legality requirements, and geolocation/traceability requirement to the plot of land. This is based on the ASEF Excel tabs A., Verified entity – Production, and B., Verified entity system.
2. Implementation mechanisms: Assess the system verification procedures, audit protocols, and chain-of-custody (CoC) model compatibility with EUDR (noting any mass balance or mixing limitations). This is based on the ASEF Excel tabs B. The verified entity system and C. The assurance provider.
3. Governance credibility: Assess independence, transparency, stakeholder engagement, and enforcement mechanisms (consequences and sanctioning in case of infractions as well as corrective actions). This is based on the ASEF tabs C. The assurance provider and D. The assurance system.

Recommendations for EUDR alignment: Address gaps identified in the system and provide recommendations.

Additional due diligence requirements for EU operators: Based on the missing and partly covered indicators from Excel tabs A and B, list all the additional checks that an operator conducting due diligence would need to carry out if sourcing from a verified entity certified by the assurance system. Due diligence should focus on any aspects of EUDR compliance (deforestation-free status, legality, traceability, or chain of custody) not fully addressed by the system's verification procedures. Not all the missing or partly covered indicators should be listed, for example, when the intent of the criteria is covered and if the indicators are very specific. This determination is based on the expert opinion of individuals involved in the evaluation and is inherently subjective but fully based on evidence provided by the evaluation.

Recommendations to the assurance system: Provide specific actionable recommendations for the assurance system to achieve optimal alignment with EUDR requirements across standard alignment, implementation strengthening and governance improvements.

The visual dashboard: This dashboard provides a visual summary of the results at criteria level.

Reference: All sources should be listed in the Assurance System Evaluation Report. For system documentation include full standard name, version and link if available: For example: PEFC ST 2002:2013 2015-12-07 Second Edition, https://cdn.pefc.org/pefc.org/media/2019-02/023fae13-c278-4104-93e0-bf48b123bc8b/5aa3f8bc-30c3-5f99-951e-e6a8f6d1d01b.pdf.

For feedback from assurance systems or stakeholders, include the name of the entity, interview/email and date, and the interviewees' position. For example: FSC email response, 09/12/2020, Head of Accreditation.

Principles for the three-page format (without counting references): Maintain consistent colour-coding while keeping text minimal and focused. Highlight findings specific to EUDR compliance, emphasizing deforestation, legality and traceability elements with a clear statement about how findings relate to due diligence implementation. Be selective by including only the most significant findings, avoiding technical jargon where possible, and using bullet points rather than lengthy paragraphs.

STEP 8

Submit ASEF and ASER drafts for the quality review.

B. The quality review

STEP 9

The quality review

A quality reviewer should review the preliminary findings in the draft ASEF and ASER. The objective of the quality review is to ensure:

1. compliance of the evaluations with the method described in this document;
2. the rigor of the evaluation process;
3. calibrated approach and application of principles, criteria and indicators according to thresholds;
4. consistency of the evaluation approach across all system evaluations; and
5. well-captured consideration of local conditions.

The quality reviewers should be informed about any controversies or disagreements that arose between the evaluator and the assurance system. This includes evaluation results that were modified due to comments obtained from the assurance system, as well as evaluation results that were maintained despite objections from the assurance system. The reviewers should receive the rationale and supporting documentation for all decisions regarding contested findings.

STEP 10

The results of the review should be provided by quality reviewer in writing to the evaluator.

STEP 11

The evaluator should **address comments from the quality review.**
All comments should be stored and integrated into the evaluation.

C. Stakeholder consultation (recommended)

STEP 12

Public consultation. Stakeholder identification

Stakeholder consultations should be conducted as a regular element of ASEF evaluations, unless the assurance system owner formally objects. Where the assurance system owner objects, a corresponding disclaimer may be included in the report. Relevant stakeholders will be identified and contacted early in the evaluation process to establish an overview of stakeholders to be consulted throughout the evaluation process. This core stakeholder group will be identified through selection criteria based on who has the best knowledge and greatest interest in the verification and certification systems and the highest potential for using the results of the evaluation in the future.

Stakeholders will be considered core stakeholders if they have experience with the implementation of the system and can provide input to the system evaluation. Core stakeholders have:

- auditing experience;
- direct experience with implementation of the system (non-governmental organizations, companies); and
- the ability to provide distinct perspectives and share complementary experiences, from the system's evaluation (research organizations, academics)- to system use (producers, traders, exporters, importers) – and relevant non-users (civil society and external stakeholder).

Consultations and discussions with relevant stakeholders will primarily take place online and in writing, with no need for in-country presence.

STEP 13

The public consultation process

Stakeholder consultations should be conducted by using the draft evaluation of the system, subsequent to the quality review.

STEP 14

The evaluator should address issues that may have arisen from the public consultation.

The evaluator should prepare a stakeholder consultation report.

The consultation report should include:

1. a summary of the issues raised and how they were addressed;
2. an analysis of the range of stakeholder groups who submitted comments; and
3. an unedited copy of all comments as an annex to the report.

D. Approval of the final Assurance System Evaluation Report

STEP 15

Approval of the final Assurance System Evaluation Report by the quality reviewer

The quality reviewer should review the revised Assurance System Evaluation Report including all changes made following the stakeholder consultation. This final review focuses on verifying that stakeholder comments have been adequately addressed and appropriately incorporated into the report. The review process should also verify that all controversies and modifications documented in Steps 6 and 9 have been transparently reported and appropriately resolved.

Additional guidance for the evaluation

Information gathering

The evaluation of each indicator should be conducted primarily using these sources of information:

- publicly available information from the system;
- other sources of public information;
- direct interviews and discussions with relevant system personnel; and
- stakeholder input via the stakeholder consultation.

Evaluation principles and coverage assessment

a. A single, general indication in the system standard on any topic may not be considered sufficient to fully address it, for example, a single generic statement about legal compliance. A topic is considered covered if the requirements are not simply stated but rather are operationalized with corresponding criteria and indicators; for example, with specific **indicators for legal compliance.** Thus, in the case of legal requirements, it should be evaluated if the system defines the scope of the legislation and if it is regarded as normative (indicator/criteria) and applicable within system documentation (i.e. required to be followed).

b. When evaluating a national system or the local interpretation of a global standard, it is crucial to note that, for certain commodities in **specific countries**, there may be no legal framework encompassing all the areas of law identified by the EUDR. In such situations, the EUDR legal requirements in the areas not covered by **local legislation** are irrelevant to the verified entities, and the corresponding ASEF indicator should be assessed as Not applicable.

   Hence, an ASEF legality indicator is marked as not relevant, and therefore, *Not applicable*, when, to the best of the evaluator team's ability and based on stakeholder consultation:

   - there is no national law that corresponds to the type of legal requirements covered by the EUDR indicator, in the Country of Production;
   - the corresponding law does not apply to the commodity under analysis (e.g. forest-related rules, or Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild and Fauna and Flora (CITES) requirements, will not apply to the cocoa sector);
   - the corresponding law does not apply to the forest or farm, or to third parties impacted by farm activities (excluding trade and customs regulations); or
   - the scope of the evaluation focuses on smallholders, and the corresponding laws identified as relevant to the ASEF indicator do not apply to small-scale production.

c. When the system standard includes **optional requirements**, i.e. not obligatory, they are not considered part of the evaluation. Voluntary requirements should only be considered if they are explicitly part of the **scope** of the system's claim (e.g. a voluntary EUDR-related standard of an assurance system). Stepwise requirements (e.g. those subject to continuous improvement programmes) should be clearly identified in the evaluation but not considered normative unless the specific steps in question have already been implemented by the system at the time of evaluation or if differentiated by a specific claim. Only immediately applicable and obligatory requirements or stepwise requirements that are currently operational shall be considered normative in the comparison. One additional caveat is where assurance systems have developed new standards that have yet to become operational or implemented. In case such standards are included in the review, it should be made clear when they are considered to have been implemented.

d. If a system standard requires a **procedure**, it is assumed that it will be implemented and followed. If the ASEF requires a specific **performance** level or **outcome**, it is assumed that a relevant system/approach will be implemented to achieve the result.

e. Evaluators should ensure that any separate clauses in standards, normative documents, or indicators that define exemptions or alternative options in other elements of the System's normative framework are considered and disclosed. Many Assurance Systems may have clearly worded indicators that appear to meet requirements but offer alternative compliance pathways or exemptions in separate clauses that must be evaluated as part of the overall assessment.

f. Each indicator in the ASEF is analysed separately for indicator-level comparison. At times there is a **one-to-one match** between indicators; however, one indicator in the ASEF often links to **several indicators** in the benchmarked standard. For example, one indicator from the ASEF corresponds to three indicators from the benchmarked system. If the three indicators from the benchmarked standard fully cover the ASEF indicator together, it will be marked as "Fully covered". If all three indicators collectively do not fully address the ASEF indicator, it will be marked as "Partially covered".

g. When a ASEF indicator does not have a corresponding **indicator** in the system standard, it is linked to the **closest** relevant criterion of the benchmarked standard. If a criterion is also not available, it is linked to the applicable principle of the evaluated standard. If the criterion (or principle) **directly and explicitly** addresses the indicator, then it is marked as "Fully covered"; otherwise, it is marked "not covered".

h. When a ASEF indicator corresponds with both an indicator and criterion from the system, only the indicator is linked.

i. The **distinction between** classifying an indicator as **"Not covered" versus "Not applicable"** lies in whether additional due diligence is necessary for an operator. If an operator needs to do an additional step, it is "Not covered" to highlight the gap. In contrast, an indicator is marked as "Not applicable" when the requirement does not pertain to a specific product or situation, i.e. it does not create a gap or require further action from the operator.

Scope of the system's claim

j. Sections B2, C and D address issues of quality of the assurance system. As a result, identified gaps (Partially covered or Not covered conclusion) indicate a potential vulnerability in relation to the system's robustness.

k. It is also important to identify which requirements are **applicable to different types of operations and groups** within the system standard (e.g. farms vs. supply chain actors, small-/medium-sized and large farms, and group certifications) and **document** these distinctions to ensure accurate assessment of coverage across the evaluated context. Conclusion columns can always be added to help distinguish between standards and actors when needed.

Definition and explanation of the possible evaluation conclusions

Conclusion	Definition	Explanation
Fully covered	When available system requirements and information and any impacts evidence available, indicate the coverage of the ASEF indicator.	Coverage is the ability of the system to provide assurance that the material traded via the system meets the indicator of the ASEF.
Intent covered	The rating is given when there are differences or gaps in individual indicators within a criterion; however, overall intent is addressed.	Intent is covered at a criterion level. It will be possible to state "Intent Covered" even if some indicators are Partially or Not Covered".
Partially covered	The rating is given when available system requirements and information as well as any available evidence of impacts indicate only partial coverage of the ASEF indicator.	Partial coverage means that the system is only partly capable of ensuring that the material traded via the system meets the indicator of the ASEF – or that the system may be compromised in one or more ways. ***Note:*** It is important to justify the partial coverage and indicate the issues resulting in a Covered conclusion not being given. This can include special concerns about system standards, credibility, rigour or coverage of the indicator.
Not covered	This rating is given when available, system requirements and information as well as any evidence of impacts indicate that there is no coverage of the ASEF indicator.	The system is not or is inadequately able to provide assurance that the material traded via the system meets the indicator of the ASEF. ***Note:*** It is important to provide a rationale for a no-coverage conclusion.
Not applicable	This rating is given when, for any given reason, the ASEF indicator does not apply.	

ANNEX A:

CLICK HERE

The Assurance System Evaluation Framework Template

ANNEX B:

CLICK HERE

The Assurance System Evaluation Report Template

ANNEX C:

CLICK HERE

Conflict of Interest Declaration Template

Forestry Division
Natural Resources and Sustainable Production
NFO-Publications@fao.org
www.fao.org/forestry/en

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, Italy

With support:

FOLUR
Food · Land Use · Restoration

ISBN 978-92-5-140679-3

9 789251 406793
CD9564EN/1/05.26